

Some Lessons Learned To Avoid Fatal Accidents

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As an accident investigator assigned to the Army Safety Center at Fort Rucker, I have the unpleasant job of determining the causes and identifying corrective actions for accidents that kill our soldiers or seriously damage our equipment. I would like to share a few lessons learned from some recent fatal accidents.

1. Do conduct pre-exercise recons of your training areas. Just because you, your unit, and your people have been to the NTC/JRTC/LTA many times, you won't automatically know if some contractor or unauthorized person dug a trench across a tank trail the week before your mission. Take a look at the training area and identify any hazards before you move in and begin the exercise.

2. Do train your personnel on the proper actions to take when encountering unexploded ordnance (UXO). The procedures in the Common Task Manual are very good. Soldiers are naturally curious — leaders need to train them not to examine things found on the ground in training areas. For units on large, open posts, this caution applies to family members and civilians as well. Teach your kids not to play with items found in the woods — they may be UXO as well.

3. Wear your seatbelts! Wear them in your POVs, and wear them in your military vehicles if they are equipped with the belts.

4. Pay attention to your driver selection and training programs. Brand new 2LT TCs coupled with brand new PV2 drivers can add up to trouble. Be sure that your drivers and TCs know the proper ground guiding procedures for day and night operations.

5. Practice your rollover drills. Don't just talk about them — DO them. Be sure that every crewman knows what to do when he hears the command "rollover" — what to hang on to, what to switch off, what to do after the vehicle comes to rest, and how to get out. Be sure that your loads plans will not block off any egress routes, and that all items are secured in place so that they won't fall out, even if the vehicle is completely upside down.

We are in the process of examining the rollover procedures for tracked and wheeled vehicles in conjunction with TRADOC, AMC, and the Program Managers' offices. We are always interested in input from the field. If you have any procedures, SOPs, or comments to add to our efforts, feel free to email them to me at hardenm@safety-emh1.army.mil.

The Safety Center publishes a monthly newsletter, "Countermeasure," that covers all aspects of ground system safety, risk management, and accident lessons learned. If your unit does not receive a copy, contact me at the above email address and we will add you to our distribution list.